

Consumers for Dental Choice

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Re: Three strikes and Lawrence Tabak should be out – as Director of NIDCR

Dear Director Zerhouni:

Lawrence Tabak's agenda to keep the public from learning the health risks of mercury fillings – backed by the special interests that fund his pet projects via the stealth group "Friends of NIDCR" – has reached a level of ethical transgressions that he should be dismissed as Director of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.

First, Tabak's assistant Braveman, keeping his boss in the loop at every stage via e-mails, circumvented the Federal Acquisition Regulation by secretly handpicking Big Tobacco consultant LSRO to do an "independent" review of the literature on mercury fillings. To reach the result consistent with Tabak's pro-mercury agenda, Braveman handed a blueprint of the desired result in advance, insisted that no one with experience in mercury toxicity be on the panel, and arranged for an absolutely unqualified meetings planning company to be the nominal "contractor." To give Tabak and Braveman the result they desired, LSRO's report had to invert the contractual research question 180 degrees, an outrage Tabak ignored so he could praise the pre-cooked result. These facts are well known to you, Director Zerhouni, as you prudently appointed a national CPA firm to investigate this ethical and legal morass.

Second, Tabak lied to Congress about the LSRO-BETAH deal. He asserted, in writing to then-Chairman Burton and Congresswoman Watson, that BETAH "identified" LSRO to be the subcontractor. In fact – a point well known to Tabak because he was cc'd on the e-mails by his assistant Braveman – it was NIDCR and its partner FDA which identified LSRO. After negotiating the deal, they found out they could not secretly hand the money to LSRO but would have to bid it out. So Braveman and his henchmen, intent on engaging LSRO, fingered an existing contractor, BETAH – a meetings planning company with absolutely no experience in doing scientific reports. BETAH was appointed strawperson contractor so the scheme with LSRO could proceed. With so much to cover up, Tabak tried to get Congress off his trail by stating, falsely, that it was BETAH which "identified" LSRO.

The third strike, the coup de grace for Tabak: the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) – which policies unethical experiments on children – ruled that Tabak's favorite project to protect mercury fillings, the notorious experiment on institutionalized children at a Portuguese orphanage, was done without the experimenters obtaining informed consent from the guardians of the children about the horrid effects of mercury exposure. To quote from their letter to Consumers for Dental Choice:

“OHRP found that the informed consent document for the research conducted by UW failed to adequately describe the reasonable foreseeable risks of the amalgams.”

Yet these experimenters knew the risk, stating in the grant request for the lucrative multimillion contract granted by Tabak, that mercury fillings could lead to:

“... chronic debilitating neuromuscular diseases [presumably meaning ALS, Parkinson’s, and/or MS] and even acute, life-threatening health outcomes.”¹

A major question of discrimination also looms. A simultaneous project involving non-institutionalized American children did disclose risks, but the Tabak-Braveman handpicked team decided that institutionalized Latin children merit no such disclosures.² Such disregard for the Portuguese orphans is turning into an international incident; our letter to Prime Minister Socrates is attached.

The BETAH-LSRO contract and cover-up proved that, at NIDCR, protecting dentists’ pocketbooks trumps science. The experiment at the Portuguese orphanage proves that Tabak’s “Friends of NIDCR” trump the health and welfare of orphans.

Tabak’s agenda to protect mercury fillings – this linchpin of old-fashioned dentistry but the bane of modern dentistry – can no longer be tolerated. If he does not quit by October 15, Dr. Zerhouni, you should ask for his resignation.

Sincerely,

Charles G. Brown
National Counsel
11 September 2007

Encl: Letter to Prime Minister Socrates (Portugal)

cc: Raynard S. Kington, Deputy Director; Norka Ruiz Bravo, Ph.D., Deputy Director for Extramural Research; Suzanne J. Servis, Director, Office of Management Assessment; John Burklow, Associate Director for Communications; Marin Allen, Deputy Director for Communications

cc: Congresswoman Diane Watson; Congressman Dan Burton

¹ As Braveman (and perhaps Tabak too) were surely aware, DeRouen and Martin were cheerleaders for mercury filling from the outset. In 2002, before the King County Council in Seattle, they testified that mercury filings are safe, an action so inconsistent with academic objectivity they were criticized even by the experiment’s toxicologist. Small wonder, then, that they proceeded to cherry-pick data to “prove” the position they had already publicly advocated, and to withhold data showing the converse.

² Tabak’s assistant Braveman doubled as supervisor of the project as well as co-author of a paper that was published about the experiment – a benefit to his career but not to the taxpayers. Rather than operate at arms-length, Braveman partnered with the researchers to whom he was forking over millions of taxpayers’ dollars.